

VZCZCXRO7876  
PP RUEHNZ RUEHPB  
DE RUEHSV #0080/01 0302205  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 302205Z JAN 07 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3733  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0256  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1557  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0101  
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0037  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0083  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0092  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0073  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1138  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0086  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1331  
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0351  
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0757  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0292  
RHMFIUU/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000080

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [FJ](#) [CH](#) [EUN](#) [UK](#) [FR](#) [KS](#) [JA](#) [MY](#) [ID](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: EMINENT PERSONS GROUP MEETING WITH FOREIGN MISSIONS IN  
FIJI

REF: STATE 10593

Summary

-----  
1. (SBU) Representatives from many foreign missions resident in Fiji condemned the military takeover in a meeting with the Pacific Island Forum's Eminent Persons Group 1/31 and called for a rapid return of democracy. A notable exception was China, which hopes for a return of stability and continued friendly ties with Fiji. The U.S., UK, the EU and the UN all called for stepped up international pressure against the widespread human rights abuses perpetrated by the military. The UK challenged Asian countries to speak up more. Malaysia rejected that appeal, stating that its primary concern is the cost of this coup to Malaysia through its likely negative impact on Malaysia's aid programs. End summary.

EPG Meets Representatives of Foreign Missions

-----  
2. (SBU) The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) of the Pacific Island Forum, in Fiji to hold discussions about the military takeover with a broad cross section of the domestic and international community, met 1/31 with representatives of many foreign missions represented in Fiji. These included the U.S., the UK, France, the European Commission, China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea and India. The EPG is meeting separately with Forum member countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Island states resident in Suva. The EPG consists of Vanuatu Deputy Prime Minister Sato Kilman, retired PNG Chief Justice Sir Arnold Arnet, Samoa's Minister of Environment Faumuina Liuga, and the retired Commander of the Australian Defense Force, Gen. Peter Cosgrove.

Foreign Reps Condemn Takeover

-----  
3. (SBU) Most missions represented condemned or "expressed regret" at the military takeover of Fiji's elected government:

--The U.S. (Embassy Suva Charge) condemned the takeover, and called for an immediate restoration of democracy and the rule of law in Fiji.

--Speaking on behalf of Germany, the current President of the EU Council, the French representative condemned the takeover and insisted on a timely return to a democratically elected government.

--The UK High Commissioner endorsed the above remarks and noted his government's unhappiness at the lack of progress by the interim government in setting out a timetable for a return to democracy.

--The EC Representative said that the EC considers the coup a breach of Article Nine of the Cotonou Agreement, triggering provisions of Article 96 of that agreement, requiring consultations with Fiji. The European Council does not recognize the legitimacy of the current interim government.

--Indonesia's Ambassador noted that his Foreign Minister had issued a statement expressing regret at the change of government in Fiji through un-democratic means. Indonesia adheres to a principle of not interfering in the "internal affairs" of Fiji.

--The Indian High Commission representative said the GOI had issued a statement immediately after the coup calling on the military to restore democracy.

--The Chinese Ambassador said his government had announced that it was following with concern the developments in Fiji. China hoped for a return to stability based on mutual respect and "the five principles of coexistence." There have been no further changes to that early statement, he said.

--The Malaysian High Commissioner said her Foreign Minister had called for an immediate restoration of democracy based on Commonwealth principles.

-- The Japanese Embassy representative said that in the immediate wake of the coup, the Japanese Foreign Ministry had condemned the

SUVA 00000080 002 OF 003

illegal overthrow and expressed its grave concern, calling for a quick return to democracy. Since then, he said, more "normal relations" had resumed.

--The head of the UNDP, who is also the senior UN resident coordinator, said there have been condemnatory statements from the UNSG and the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The UN office has suspended all contact and engagement with the higher levels of the interim government.

--The representative of the Korean Embassy said that while his government had "been thinking about a response," he had no guidance from Seoul. The EPG's Cosgrove suggested that he pass to Seoul the "broad sentiments" expressed by the other countries present.

Aid Continuing?

14. (SBU) A number of the representatives reviewed the status of the aid they give Fiji:

-- The Representative of the European Commission noted that the EU has budgeted FJ\$350 million in support of a sugar industry adaption strategy over the 2007-2013 period. These funds are a key subject of the upcoming consultations with Fiji. He said the EU was funding a F\$44 million education project to upgrade 300 schools' infrastructure; a F\$2 million voter education program; and a environmental project.

--The Malaysian High Commissioner said that development cooperation with Fiji would not be affected.

--Indonesia will continue to implement existing technical cooperation programs.

--India has made no decision to suspend technical cooperation with Fiji, and previously scheduled visits related to existing projects in support of Fiji's sugar industry will go ahead.

--Japan will continue providing "grassroots" assistance to Fiji. Larger scale projects are currently suspended. The Japanese representative noted that Japan has stopped issuing visas to ministers in the interim government and to high-ranking military

personnel.

#### A Quick Return to Democracy?

-----

15. (SBU) In response to a question from the EPG about the preferred timetable for a return to democracy, the UK High Commissioner said the timeframe should be "as short as possible." He said the UK acknowledged the government's insistence that there needed to be a national census and an adjustment of electoral boundaries. However, once those were completed (and it shouldn't take long) there should be an election. The French representative also expressed concern about the lack of a timetable. Embassy Suva Charge reiterated that the U.S. supports an immediate return to democracy. He expressed concern that calls for a census, a boundaries commission, and other intermediate steps are being used by the interim government as a pretext for delaying the return of democratic rule.

16. (SBU) EPG member Luiga noted that if the interim government agreed to the international community's demand for a quick return to democracy, via a census and other prerequisites, the government would require resources. The international community would have to provide them. Only the EC representative responded, saying an answer would have to await the planned EU-Fiji consultations.

#### Human Rights Abuses/Interference With Judiciary

-----

17. (SBU) A number of missions raised concerns about human rights abuses perpetrated by the military and interference in the judiciary. The U.S. condemned the widespread and ongoing violations of civil liberties and human rights. These actions, together with the blatant interference by the military in the judiciary have severely undermined the rule of law in Fiji. The UK High Commissioner said his government is very concerned about the many

SUVA 00000080 003 OF 003

reports of human rights abuses. The same is true for the government's interference in the judiciary. An immediate cessation of human rights abuses and the prosecution of abuse perpetrators was essential and achievable; the military was responsible for them and could stop them. The French representative said the European Council had expressed deep concern about reports of human rights abuses and noted the suspension of the Chief Justice and the president's amnesty decree. The UNDP representative said the UN has clear and credible reports of human rights abuses, but agreed with an EPG members' comment that abuse victims are afraid to complain to their government or the Fiji Human Rights Commission, fearing reprisals.

#### Malaysia Rejects the UK Challenge to Speak Out Against Human Rights Violations

-----

18. (SBU) The UK High Commissioner called upon the representatives of the Asian countries in the room to speak out more strongly against human rights abuses. The Malaysian High Commissioner was the only representative of an Asian country to respond. She said that, as much as Malaysia deplores the human rights abuses that have occurred, as a fellow developing country with limited assistance resources to aid Fiji's development, "our primary and immediate concern is the cost of this coup" to Malaysia, which will see its assistance programs delayed or derailed. She also read a brief statement in support of the work of the controversial Fiji Human Rights Commission (FHRC), who's work she said was fair. (Comment: Malaysia is either woefully misinformed about the work of the FHRC or FHRC Director Shaista Shameem has friends in high places in Malaysia. The FHRC can best be described as a tool of the military regime. End comment.)

#### What Can the International Community Do?

-----

19. (SBU) Several EPG members expressed deep concern about continuing human rights violations and asked if the international community could be doing more to convince the military to stop its actions, including through "smart sanctions" if necessary. The U.S., EC, the UN, and UK reiterated the need for the international community to continue voicing outrage at human rights violations. They noted the important role the EPG might be able to play in this regard.

## Comment

¶10. (SBU) The EPG members were well prepared and well informed. In light of a number of comments EPG members made, we expect them to raise concerns about human rights abuses to the interim government. Their comments also indicate they are likely to urge a quick return to democratic rule.